The Boys and Girls' Bookshop—By Elene Foster

AT FIRST glance it just looks like a big, comfy home library with its chintz hangings, its bright windowdoxes, its gaily colored pictures and its rows of bookshelves, with here and there a round table, all filled to capacity with books and magazines. When one looks a little closer, however, one discovers that the chairs are lower than the ordinary library chairs, that the pictures are for the most part beautifully colored illustrations of well known fairy tales and that the volumes on the tables and shelves were written exclusively for boys and girls.

In short, this is the celebrated Bookshop for Boys and Girls, whose fame has gone forth among the juvenile population throughout the land.

Sitting in state on the old-fashioned mantel is the presiding genius of the shop, Alice Heidi, a lovely French doll, christened by the children, by vote, with names of their two favorite heroines, Alice, of Wonderland fame, and Heidi.

The bookshop bears a very strong family resemblance to our own "Sunwise Turn," in fact, it might well be its younger sister. The same ideals and principles have governed its founders as those which inspired the directors of its elder sister, and if it is a trifle more conservative than its New York relative one must remember that its patrons are among "the younger set" and that its habitat is Boston.

The Bookshop for Boys and Girls is only a year old. It grew quite naturally out of an experiment which was tried by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Boston, of producing children's plays with child actors. The experiment was not entirely successful, but it did serve to bring the children of the members of the union together and to make them feel at home in its rooms. It seemed a pity to lose this contact and so Miss Bertha E. Mahoney, who had been in charge of the play producing experiment and who through this work had become intensely interested in child literature, conceived the idea of a Saturday morning story hour for these boys and girls, particularly the younger ones whose ages ranged from five to ten years. A professional story-teller entertained the children at these weekly meetings and stimulated them to read stories for themselves, and from this grew the Bookshop for Boys and Girls.

Here one finds books for children of all ages from five to fifteen, good books all of them, but not necessarily of the "highbrow" variety. There are juvenile classics as well as modern books of fiction and travel and history. A great feature of the shop is its French department. These books are carefully selected by Mlle. Clément, professor of French language and literature at the Lycée de Versailles.

The children come in and make their own selections unhampered by the influence of any "grown-up." The shelves and tables are open to them, as are also the chests of drawers where the books for the younger children are hidden away with malice aforethought, for wise little Miss Mahoney understands the psychology of her little patrons exceedingly well and she realizes that a book which a child discovers "all by himself" hidden away in a drawer is worth a dozen of those lying in plain sight on the table.

"They are real people, these children," declares this same wise little person. "Seeing them as I do here has taught me a great deal. I realize, for one thing, that the condescending attitude which we grown-ups are wont to assume toward children is all wrong. They have minds and ideas which are well worth our sober consideration. They are real human beings."

The Bookshop for Boys and Girls is a boon to parents, particularly those who have had little experience with children and whose firstborn has just reached the age where he is anxious to exercise his newly acquired talent by reading stories for himself. Two such parents, neither of whom looked a day over twenty years of age, were sitting on the floor of the shop on the morning of my visit, eagerly discussing the books ranged on the lower shelf of one of the bookcases.

"'Five Little Peppers,'" said the pretty young mother. "How I adored that book! But I suppose Betty isn't quite old enough for that yet. I'd love to read it again myself."

"'Toby Tyler, or Ten Weeks With the Circus,'" said the young father, picking up a book in a red binding. "By George, that was a crackerjack! Same old binding and same old illustrations. I'll buy it now in case it's out of print by the time that Billy's old enough to read it."

"And 'Polly Cologne.' Fancy my forgetting her! How Betty will love her!" This again from the young mother.

"And 'The Peterkin Papers.' I say, Dolly, this is some shop!" from the father. From all of which one may deduce the fact that the children are not the only ones who enjoy rummaging through the volumes at the Bookshop for Boys and Girls. Many an old acquaintance has been renewed within the cheery walls of that book-lined room.

The pictures on the walls over the bookcases are carefully chosen and depict favorite scenes or characters in juvenile fiction. They, as well as the books, are all for sale.

The bookshop is extending its activities all the time. It recently published its first book, a fairy story called "Guld, the Cavern King," by Mary L. B. Branch. It holds weekly conferences on Saturday mornings during the winter, presided over by some person well known in the literary world, for the benefit of teachers and librarians. During the summer it sends collections of books suitable for children's summer reading to the resorts along the north and south shores of Massachusetts.

While a bookshop for boys and girls may seem a novel idea, as a matter of fact it is at least two hundred years old, for away back in the early part of the eighteenth century John Newbery established a "Juvenile Library" in London, and shortly after this several other booksellers followed suit, the most celebrated being Mrs. Godwin, whose Juvenile Library in Skinner Street was known throughout England.

So far as one can ascertain, the first juvenile bookshop in this country was established in Philadelphia in 1802 by one Benjamin Johnson. William Wood, an English member of the Society of Friends, opened the first juvenile bookshop in New York in Pearl Street in the early part of the nineteenth century, but for fully a hundred years no one has seen fit to open a shop devoted exclusively to the sale of children's books until about a year ago, when little Miss Mahoney in Boston saw the possibilities of such an enterprise. She threw open the doors of that big, cheery room overlooking the Public Garden to the little people whose good fortune it is to live in the city which is hallowed by memories of Louisa M. Alcott, Jacob Abbott, Lucretia P. Hale, Sarah Orne Jewett, James Otis and the rest, whose books are beloved by children the wide world over.

"Back Home"—By a Native Bostonian

TWO elderly Boston ladies were sauntering along a country road on the outskirts of the city when they came upon a milestone bearing the inscription, "I m. from Boston." "Look, sister," said one, "here is an old tombstone. Can you read the epitaph?"

The other adjusted her spectacles and bent over the moss covered stone. "It's quite plain," said she. 'I'm from Boston.' How simple, sister, and yet how sufficient."

This has always been my favorite Boston story, because, to my mind, there never was one which illustrates so well the real Boston attitude toward the rest of the world. It is a dreadful thing to be so supremely self satisfied with one's self, and yet it is the heritage of every last one of us who were born in Boston. It is just as much a part of our being as is our New England conscience and just as difficult to get rid of.

Boston is the Peter Pan of American cities. It is the town that will never grow up and a village it will remain until the end of the chapter.

"Off Islanders" Are To Be Pitied

Its provincialism is appalling. A blatant example may be seen in its newspapers, which feature on their front pages in big type all the petty little local happenings and tuck away on the inside of the sheet the really great events of the outside world. Richard Waldo, formerly of The Tribune, created a tempest in the Boston teapot by declaring "right out in meeting," before a Boston audience, that "The Christian Science Monitor" was the only real live newspaper in Boston, and he was right.

The newspapers are not to blame. They are merely catering to the taste of their readers, and those readers are not particularly interested in the happenings of the great world outside their city limits. Their attitude toward that world is much the same as that of the inhabitants of the island of Nantucket, who are wont to refer to the millions of people who have not the good fortune to live on their hallowed soil as "off islanders."

At the time of the great German drive New York was all agog with excitement and the display on the outside of the Public Library looked like the billboards of a country town prior to the arrival of the circus. I went to Boston and came out of the Back Bay station into Copley Square, and there stood the Boston Public Library, pure and undefiled, without so much as a recruiting poster on its classic façade. In fact, there were no placards displayed on the fences or public buildings anywhere, and I commented on this fact to my relatives and asked if they knew that we were at war. They replied that they did not display their feelings in the vulgar fashion of New York, and they saw no reason why the beautiful architecture of their city should be desecrated because there was fighting three thousand miles away. "We have sacrificed the Common to war work," said they, "surely that is enough."

I saw those "war buildings" on Boston Common—trim little white cottages, with neat little grass covered front yards inclosed in white palings, as neat and prim as a New England schoolma'am.

I love Boston—its crooked old streets, its cobbles, its lovely Colonial buildings, and the view of the sunset down the slope of Beacon Hill. The sight of the gilded dome of the State House gives me a thrill such as no foreign cathedral ever gave me.

At the same time I can see its funny side, and there is no doubt about it—it is funny. Where on earth, for instance, save in this literary centre of the universe, would you find a tombstone maker who advertises himself as a "mortuary architect"?

With the memory of this and similar "highbrow" signs in my mind, it was a distinct shock when I discovered displayed in a restaurant on Copley Square this legend: "Ladies' Lunch. With or Without Escort." I am quite sure that the man who is responsible for that sign is an "off islander."

We may revile the New York subway, we may grumble at every step as we "follow the green arrow" along the circuitous path that leads from the Grand Central Station to Times Square, but, let me tell you, this is a "strait and narrow path" compared with the complicated maze of the Boston so-called "rapid transit" system. Everybody gets lost in the Boston subway, even the oldest inhabitant, and they expect to get lost and calculate their time for reaching their destination accordingly.

"How do you ever know where to go?" I asked my mother, who has a pretty good bump of location.

"I don't know," she replied. "Nobody knows. One just keeps on trying until one finds the right train."

A Perfect Circus Is the Boston "Sub"

A visit to the Park Street Station of this underground maze during rush hours—if there can be said to be such a time in Boston—is much more amusing than going to the circus. The would-be travellers meander slowly down the steps of the barest, coldest, most cheerless dungeon that civilized man ever paid ten cents to enter. They are laden with parcels, including—we are forced to admit it—the much ridiculed Boston bag. In my day these were made of cloth with leather ends and were used principally by the women of the community. Now they are made entirely of leather and are equally popular with both men and women.

Slowly the travellers descend the steps, and there is a fixed, glassy look in their eyes. They stumble and jostle one another, now and then a parcel is dropped, and this causes a momentary pause in the descending stream, but the eyes of the throng are never raised or lowered, no one ever glances to the right or left, nothing short of an earthquake would cause the multitude to remove its eyes from the indicator, which by means of illuminated figures tells at which white post each car will stop.

A figure 4 flashes forth. The slow procession becomes a mad rush for post No. 4. Children squeal and perform a sort of May-pole dance around the whitewashed pillar; sedate elderly women pick up their skirts and hurl themselves into the throng, the Boston bags vibrate with the excitement.

A car approaches and they surge on board. The only calm person in the lot is the conductor. The Boston conductor is always calm, always polite; he never loses his poise or his temper nor fails to answer the most asinine question in a most respectful manner.

"Be very careful, madam," he says, "the step is unusually high; take your time, the car will wait." Quite different from the "Step lively!" of his New York brother, which is usually accompanied with a poke in the back.

Just as the car, now filled to the last inch of standing room, is about to start, the conductor addresses the multitude:

"This car goes to Jamaica Plain," he says.

There is a great to-do. The tide turns. There is a general exodus, a grand rush for the door, a buzz of conversation. The wrong car stopped at post No. 4. The conductor, who was absolutely blameless in the matter, apologizes most abjectly for the mistake.

The crowd, back once more on the cold concrete floor of the dungeon, fixes its eyes on the indicator with the same long-suffering, patient stare. It hasn't long to wait. Another car comes into view around the curve—another car? No, on second glance it is a train of cars. It stops at post No. 4, and the May-pole dance is repeated, and this time there is no mistake. But never, never in all my life have I seen anything like this train of cars. Here is a bright and shining example of New England thrift, for who but a New Englander, I ask you, would ever have conceived the idea of taking two old cars and joining them in the middle by means of a bit of another car so that they look exactly like two rooms and a bath on wheels? Yet they answer the purpose very well. They have become a "prepayment" car, which, if you please, is Bostonese for "pay-as-you-enter."

Rainy Day Clothes Are a Conviction

Boston is at its very, very worst on a rainy day. The dampness, the east winds and the muddy streets are bad enough, but the bedraggled dowdiness of the pedestrians adds a hundredfold to the general gloom. "Rainy day clothes"—I had forgotten that there were such things. It all comes back to me, however. There are three grades of clothes in Boston—"best clothes," "everyday clothes" and "rainy day clothes." "Rainy day clothes"—toques and suits of the vintage of 1900—you can see a long procession of them on Boylston Street any rainy morning. And the expressions on the faces of their wearers are correspondingly seedy, for what woman can feel cheerful or happy when she is looking her very worst?

When I first came to New York I spent an entire afternoon going from shop to shop in search of a "rainy day hat." Creations of lace and satin and feathers were shown me, and I patiently explained over and over again that it was a "plain, rainy day hat" that I desired. I was met with puzzled looks and shrugs of the shoulders, until at last I met a superior person who understood. "Oh, yes," she said, "I know exactly what you mean. I used to work in Boston."

Prohibition has had a curious effect on Bostonians. I fancy it is only another instance of New England thrift, of saving and laying by for the traditional rainy day, only in this case it is for a dry one. Men who have never drunk a glass of spirituous liquor in their lives have filled their cellars with kegs and bottles full of "rum," which is the New England name for any kind of intoxicating liquor, in case that at some future time they might like to drink. The papers are filled with recipes for home brewed liquors, most of which feature the prune as an absolutely essential ingredient, with the result—and this is the gospel truth—that there is a prune famine in Boston!